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ABSTRACT

This document, part of a series of papers which describe the assessment of student learning in various aspects of the South Carolina curriculum from prekindergarten through grade 12, focuses on the assessment of student learning in the social studies classroom. It begins with an overview of current curriculum goals in social studies education and offers a description of various instructional practices used in typical school classrooms. Subsequent sections describe alternative methods of assessing social studies learning that are consistent with modern curriculum and instructional goals. These methods include performance-based assessments, observation records, checklists, anecdotal records, portfolios, work samples, and exhibits. Criteria for evaluation are also provided. Few models of performance tasks exist, and many have yet to pass measures of validity and reliability. However, reception of the assessment strategies described in this report is generally positive, as teachers recognize the effectiveness of this type of assessment. Appendix A lists performance tasks in the social studies classroom, and Appendix B presents the Discussion Scoresheet. (SLD)

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ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IN SOCIAL STUDIES

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in the Assessment of Student Learning

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South Carolina Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning (CEASL)

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Foreword

This report is part of a series of documents prepared by the South Carolina Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning (CEASL) to describe assessment of student learning in various school curriculum areas from prekindergarten through grade twelve. The focus of this document is assessment of student learning in the social studies classroom. The report begins with an overview of current curriculum goals in social studies education and offers a description of various instructional practices used in typical school classrooms. The subsequent sections describe alternative methods of assessing social studies learning that are consistent with modern curriculum and instructional goals. Lastly, descriptions of various methods for observing and recording student performance and criteria for evaluation are provided.

The South Carolina Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning was established by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and is supported by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and the College of Education, University of South Carolina. The purpose of this Center is to increase awareness among teacher-educators of recent efforts to change approaches used to assess students' learning in pre-school through high school, and to encourage and support efforts to enhance training in testing, measurement and the assessment of students' learning for preservice educators. The Center is based on the educational philosophy that the fair, accurate and informative assessment of students' learning is an integral part of the teaching-learning process.

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Comments or suggestions concerning the information in this report are welcome and may be directed to the authors at the Center.

Introduction

The question, "What is Social Studies?" is not an easy one to answer with a list of curriculum goals or instructional topics. In the recently published Handbook Of Research On Social Studies Teaching and Learning: A Project of the National Council for the Social Studies, (Shaver, 1991), the above question is raised by Michael B. Lybarger (1991) in a discussion of the historiography of social studies. He points out that views about what the social studies encompass vary across time and are related to trends in society, in the academic disciplines, and in education. Social studies education is typically molded to meet the needs and intended purposes of those empowered to develop the curriculum. At times, constitutional rights and societal values have been high priorities of social studies education, where as at other times, civic duties and pride in citizenship have been more strongly emphasized.

Curricular Goals

Although the evolution of the field of social studies is beyond the scope of this paper, consideration of current curricular intentions is important to a discussion of recommended assessment techniques. Emphasis and priorities in social studies education change from time to time, yet, there is a consistent pattern that guides definition of a curriculum which is developmentally appropriate. Children first encounter social studies in kindergarten or first grade when they learn about their families, communities, local geography and culture, local and national celebrations and famous historical events and people (Wyner & Farquhar, 1991). The egocentric child explores and reflects on a personal world and begins to experience the concepts and nature of knowledge in the disciplines of history, geography, and sociology. Progression through higher grade levels exposes students to an ever widening circle of people and cultures; geographies, both physical and economical; events, both historical and contemporary; governance, both national and global, and the integrated and interrelated issues connected with each of the above.

The National Commission on Social Studies published Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century in 1989 which provided guidelines for curriculum development in social studies for K-12 (The National Commission on Social Studies, 1989). The commission provides goals and objectives related to such traditional areas as history, geography, government, economics, and citizenship, but it also suggests drawing upon knowledge bases in anthropology, political science, sociology, and psychology. The commission report includes ways in which these disciplines also contribute to the social studies curriculum.

In tandem with certain content/knowledge goals in social studies education are intended and desired philosophical and behavioral outcomes. These goals include civic/national pride and loyalty; knowledge and practice of civil and constitutional rights, ethics, morals, and values; environmental/ecological awareness and preservation; and an understanding and appreciation of diversity in culture, ethnicity, and race. The importance of global awareness, understanding of interdependence, and tolerance of differences among fellow human beings is stressed (Alleman, & Rosaen, 1991).

Experts in the field (Alleman & Rosaen, 1991; Mackey, 1991) also recognize another curricular goal for social studies education. Critical thinking strategies such as the ability to analyze and interpret information. The rhetoric from different perspectives about issues in the discipline are also emphasized in the social studies curriculum. Teachers encourage problem solving and analysis of events for causal relationships, as well as inventiveness and forward thinking toward the betterment of both our world population and the planet we inhabit. Students are challenged to analyze customs, laws, ethnic values and basic human rights in order to clarify personal values and reflect on the implied values in society. In other words, the social studies curriculum actively engages students in coming to know facts, applying learned concepts broadly across content domains, and developing essential cognitive abilities needed to participate in a global citizenry.

Instructional Approaches

Contemporary instruction has moved away from teacher centered classrooms in which teachers use direct instructional approaches to transmit important facts, dates, information, and procedures. Modern social studies classrooms find students engaged in inquiry as individuals or within collaborative groups. The investigation might be centered around current issues like the preservation of the environment or it might focus on events or developments in the past, for example, what could have been done to avoid the American Civil War (Jarolimek, 1993). An inquiry approach to learning, requires students to locate and examine primary sources in newspaper libraries and archival records of state governments. For example, students reconstruct an historical period in time by researching and documenting the actual experiences of different ethnic groups rather than by simply relying on accounts found in textbooks. Thus through their own research and interpretation of the information students may come to understand that historical accounts are biased by the historian who recounts the events (Legislative Office of Research Liaison, 1988). Critical thinking is developed through investigation beyond the history textbook when students learn to consider alternative explanations of the past. The use of historical fiction enables students to vicariously experience a period in time through a pleasurable immersion in customs, costumes, characters and conflict.

Just as students go beyond the textbook in the study of history, The National Council for Geography Education, & The Association of American Geographers (1983), recommend that the geography textbook become only one of many source materials used in the social studies classroom. Students now use a variety of resources and networks to collect information on environmental factors such as acid rain's effect on rain forests and agricultural crops. As an extended activity, students may report in the school newspaper how the deleterious effects of acid rain impact on the economy of a local region and the world food supply. In geography education, students do not just learn how to locate a place on a map, they learn how to use a map to plan a camping trip or develop an evacuation plan for a city in the case of a disaster. For example, in a disaster exercise such as a volcanic eruption, students may consider such issues as climate conditions (i.e. temperatures and wind direction), food and water supplies, provisions for shelter, medical facilities and even emotional/psychological assistance that would be needed for survival and relocation.

Alternative Assessment for Social Studies Education

Clearly, the curricular and instructional shift in social studies education from transmission of discrete facts and isolated pieces of information to integration of content and cognitive functions, requires new strategies for assessment of student learning. The assessment of development in moral and social cognition is also important. Such outcomes are not easily assessed through traditional paper and pencil tests and at times may only be evident in completed projects and through students' outward behaviors, like their effort and enthusiasm for the project or their commitment and objectivity while investigating an issue.

Wiggins, (as cited in Nickell, 1992), recommends performance assessment in which

> "the students have to do something, fashion something, construct something, speak, write, turn the stuff of content and problems into some product or performance." (p.92)

The implications for social studies instruction and assessment become clearer in Wiggins' definition of "authentic" assessment:

> "An "authentic" assessment is one that would be much more a simulation or representation of the kinds of challenges that face professionals or citizens when they need to do something with their knowledge." (p.92)

Developing assessment approaches which can be embedded in course curricular goals and instructional objectives becomes the challenge for social studies teachers and assessment professionals (Jarolimek & Parker, 1993). Assessment should be on-going in order to capture process as well as product goals. The following sections provide assessment alternatives to teacher made, prepackaged, or standardized social studies tests. An example of each method is provided for illustration. The examples may be specific to a particular content or grade level, however, the reader is encouraged to envision a similar technique adapted to their own discipline or students' developmental level.

Performance-based Assessment

Performance assessment clearly defines a standard by which student learning can be measured. In a performance task students might use information they have gathered to solve a problem or construct a product. Performance tasks can take many forms depending on the type of content covered and the cognitive processes the instruction is intended to elicit. Instructional activities such as debates, oral reports, or simulations of historical events provide a context to assess both the students' level of knowledge and their ability to employ the processes of inquiry in the social sciences.

For example, students preparing for a classroom debate dealing with an issue of global concern such as the United Nations' involvement in resolving conflicts occurring with the break up of the Soviet Union, could demonstrate a range of insights and abilities. It would be necessary for them to gather information from a wide range of sources both current and

historical. The students would need to develop understandings of the cultural differences and ethnic rivalries which have given rise to the atrocities reported on the daily news. They may need to investigate the physical geography associated with disagreements about national borders. At the same time the economic implications of proposals outsiders' offer for peace must be analyzed. In short, students could acquire insight and understanding of the complexity of political, social, and cultural conflicts and demonstrate the ability to gather information as they prepare for their classroom debate.

During the debate both the participates and the audience would be able to demonstrate to separate the facts from opinions, empirical evidence from emotional claims, objectivity from bias. The examples contained in Appendix A suggest other student performance tasks and outline content and processes that could be assessed.

Observation Records, Checklists and Anecdotal Records

Teachers often use systematic observations focused on a few students at a time to gain insight into students' on-going thought processes. For example, while students are conducting an investigation in small groups a teacher might observe social interaction, cooperation, and open-mindedness. At the same time, the teacher could be assessing the quality and quantity of contributions individual students make to the group project. A wide range of strategies can be used to record the observations made during such classroom activities. Anecdotal records which are written descriptive accounts of behaviors may be used as one method of recording teacher observations.

Jarolimek and Parker (1993) propose useful methods to record informal observations and assessments of student participation in class work. A teacher can create a grid with quality of work listed across the top and characteristics they are expecting to observe down the side. This method facilitates on-going observations which occur during individual or group work. Anecdotal records can be inserted in larger spaces on a checklist, or written on individual student index cards where the teacher can quickly note the date and activity and the behavior observed. These records can provide rich sources of information when teachers are checking a student's progress over time, when reflecting on whether a particular instructional approach or unit was effective, and when reporting to parents the student's progress.

Score sheets may also be developed to record teachers' observations during an activity in the social science classroom. For example, while observing a group discussion, a teacher might use a score sheet to record positive and negative characteristics of participation by an individual or team of students. Appendix B contains an example of a score sheet developed by Zola (1992) to record observations during a class discussion.

Portfolios, Work Samples, and Exhibits

In portfolio assessment, the teacher and students work together to collect samples of the completed over the course of a specified period of time. This time span can be as short as a one week unit of study or as long as the entire school year. The curriculum objectives should be clearly defined and used to guide selection of the items for inclusion in the portfolio (Adams & Hamm, 1992). The artifacts included in the collection should demonstrate the student's ability to meet the intended objectives in the social studies curriculum (Jarolimek & Parker, 1993). Samples in the chart below summarize materials that maybe included in a portfolio used in social studies classrooms.

Types of Student Work

Student Writing:
- ·letters to congressman,
- ·a constitution for a new democracy

Student Reflection:
- ·reaction paper to a visit to court
- ·reaction to a video on acid rain

Research Efforts:
- ·school newspaper article reporting an investigation about the AIDS
- ·evidence of use of information from a computer database

Artistic Endeavor:
- ·photographs of a public demonstration
- ·collage on local ethnicity

Use of Technology:
- ·recording of an interview
- ·video tape of a debate

Student Self-Evaluation:
- ·journal entries on learning experiences
- ·report on student-teacher conferences

Evaluating Student Portfolios

Evaluation criteria should be specified to inform students of the outcomes they are expected to meet. The following chart summarizes suggested criteria for evaluating portfolios in the social studies classroom.

Portfolio Evaluation in the Social Studies: Suggested Criteria

Does the student's work show that he or she has:

- demonstrated an understanding of the responsibility of citizenship?
- organized and displayed data?
- conjectured, explored, analyzed, or looked for patterns in assignments?
- made use of the intellectual tools of analog and inquiry?
- evidenced an understanding of democratic values and social responsibility?
- used concrete materials (or drawings or sketches) as an aid for interpreting and analyzing problems or issues?
- used technology (video excerpts, computers, graphics, or calculators) to suggest solutions to problems?
- searched for information, and explored and critically examined research data?

(Source: Adams, D. M. & Hamm, M. E., 1992).

One of the most important features that has led experts in many fields to recommend portfolio assessment is the level of involvement of students in the assessment process. Because students are aware of the criteria for evaluation and they monitor their daily activities in light of curriculum goals. As they assemble materials for presentation in their portfolios, they must reflect and evaluate themselves. The portfolio process empowers the learner and prepares them for the wide range of roles and responsibilities they will face in and outside of school contexts.

Summary

As new directions in social studies curriculum and instruction continue to evolve, educators need to create strategies which accurately and appropriately assess student learning in this diverse discipline. Assessment which is sensitive to students' thinking processes and skills can inform teachers of their instructional effectiveness and the students of their learning progress.

While the strategies described in this report hold great promise for future assessment of student learning in social studies, much work still remains. Although there are models of performance tasks in existence, there are only a few and they have yet to pass measures of validity and reliability in all cases. Writing appropriate tasks can be a lengthy process, while developing a universal language for scoring rubrics can progress through multiple trials and revisions. Portfolios are in wider use, but teachers who do not include essential components in using portfolios, such as establishing a specific purpose and audience, or stating evaluation criteria clearly, are under utilizing the potentials for portfolio assessment. Methods for reporting student progress to parents by means of numerical or alphabetical grades can lose

the richness achieved by portfolio assessment and anecdotal records. Educators should investigate possible alternatives to reporting that are in keeping with the assessment strategies used to gather the reporting information.

Reception of the assessment strategies described in this report are positive to date. Teachers feel this type of assessment is more effective in informing them about reaching their curricular and instructional goals. Students also seem to enjoy a greater sense of empowerment in their efforts to learn and demonstrate achievement through this type of alternative assessment.

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Appendix A

Performance Tasks in Social Studies Classrooms

Tasks:	Debates and Mock Trials
Content:	Information representing both sides. Facts, diagrams, maps, artifacts, interviews etc.
Process:	Critical examination of all issues involved. Use of information Presentation of arguments Flow of ideas and causal relationships established Listening and speaking skills Ability to compare and contrast
Task:	Oral Presentation
Content:	Detailed information - historical, geographic, economic Names, dates, locations, events, customs, ethnic characteristics, etc.
Process:	Purpose of presentation Format decisions, (i.e. charts, models, pictures) Suggested usefulness of information Use of examples to explain concepts and ideas Use of non-examples to avoid misconceptions
Task:	Written Assignments
Content:	Events and characters in a biographical sketch Issues and arguments in a persuasive letter Concepts of democracy in a new constitution Description of artifacts from the past
Process:	Problem solving for persuasion Understanding relationships between issues Analyzing arguments for content and substance Understanding of cause and effect Application of concepts such as democracy and freedom
Task:	Investigations
Content:	Characteristics of locations, populations, and economics Facts about climate, customs, agriculture and industry Maps and charts used to represent information
Process:	Knowledge of information sources Understanding of how to use maps and geographic information Ability to plan a trip or disaster evacuation by using geographic sources Analysis of geographic locations as influences in both economic and conflict problems

Adapted from: Kon, J. H. & Martin-Kniep, 1992; Palmquist, K. 1992.

Appendix B

The Discussion Scoresheet

Positive		
Points		
(2)	Taking a position on a question	_____
(1)	Making a relevant comment	_____
(2)	Using evidence to support a position or presented factual information	_____
(1)	Drawing another person into the discussion	_____
(1)	Asking a clarifying question or moving the discussion along	_____
(2)	Making an analogy	_____
(2)	Recognizing contradictions	_____
(2)	Recognizing irrelevant comments	_____
Negative		
Points		
(-2)	Not paying attention or distracting others	_____
(-2)	Interruption	_____
(-1)	Irrelevant comment	_____
(-3)	Monopolizing	_____
(-3)	Personal attack	_____
Total points		_____
Grade		_____

Source: Zola (1992) p. 122.

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